



## THE RELATIONSHIP OF PERSONAL GROWTH INITIATIVE, PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING, AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AMONG ADOLESCENTS

**Nadia Ayub**

*Institute of Business Management, Pakistan*

**Shahid Iqbal**

*Federal Urdu University for Arts, Science & Technology, Pakistan*

This study investigates the correlation between personal growth initiatives, psychological distress, and psychological well-being among adolescents. It was assumed that personal growth initiative is significantly associated with psychological well-being, and negatively associated with psychological distress among adolescents. A study consists of 150 (75 males and 75 females) college students of Karachi, Pakistan. A Personal Growth Initiative Scale (Robitschek, C., 1998); Ryff's Scales of Psychological Well-Being (RPWB; Ryff, C., 1995); & Psychological Distress Scale (K10; Kessler, R.C., 1996) were administered. For all statistical analysis, Spearman's rho was calculated to assess the association among personal growth initiatives, psychological well-being and psychological distress. The findings of the study suggest that personal growth initiative is positively associated with psychological well-being and negatively associated with psychological distress among adolescents. Furthermore, adolescents who are high in personal growth initiative and psychological well-being experience less mental health issues.

**Keywords:** Personal growth initiative, Psychological well-being, Psychological distress.

### Introduction

Personal growth initiative is one of the interesting topics for the developmental psychologists especially from adolescent's perspective. Robitschek, (1998, 1999) defined personal growth initiative as an active and intentional involvement in the self change process. Robitschek, (2003) suggests that personal growth initiative is hypothetically assumed to have cognitive and behavioral aspects included general aims relating to personal plans and change to accomplish those objectives. Research has demonstrated that people with higher levels of PGI tend to have high level of psychological, emotional, and social well-being (Robitschek & Keyes, 2009) and minor levels of psychological and emotional distress (Robitschek & Kashubeck, 1999).

Personal growth initiative is an essential construct capable of enhancing well-being of individuals. The study of well-being has received ever increasing special attention in the last decade, predominantly integrated into the field of positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Lexical meaning

of well-being is “a contented state of being happy, healthy and prosperous” and it refers “optimal psychological experience and functioning” (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Well-being is divided into two dimensions; psychological well-being and subjective well-being. A subjective well-being is indicates as the balance of negative and positive affect, and satisfaction whereas psychological well-being is how commitment to existential challenges is perceived (Keyes et al., 2002). Psychological well-being can be interrelated to cognitive function, personality, self-esteem, and mood, comprising of positive affects such as vigour, morale, and happiness, and negative affects for example depression and anxiety (Brown, 1992). However, psychological well-being was studied from various aspects; personal and cultural differences affecting psychological well-being, predictors of psychological well-being and change of psychological well-being over lifespan (Blanchflower & Oswald, 2008; Brown & Ryan, 2003; Diener & Diener, 1995; Kwan et al., 1997; Roothman et al., 2003; Sheldon & Niemiec, 2006; Shields & Price, 2005). PGI is strongly correlated with psychological well-being of individual. PGI propels individuals to continue seeking challenge and growth that can lead into the achievement of life goal and personal fulfilment (Robitschek, 1997). The Psychological Well-being Scale developed by Ryff (1989b) includes six aspects: environmental mastery, autonomy, self-acceptance, personal growth, positive relations with others, and purpose in life. A purpose in life and personal growth are theoretically closer to the eudaimonic well-being, and experimentally their association is high (Ryff, 1989b).

Previous literature also suggests that personal growth initiative is negatively associated with psychological distress. Robitschek & Kashubeck, (1999) suggest that high level of personal growth initiatives is related with high level of well-being and minor level of distress, depression, and anxiety. A possible reason of this association is that personal growth initiative might prevent adolescents from developing distress symptoms, decrease the intensity of distress occurrence, or smooth the progress of recuperation from distress. For example, when a teenager experienced distressing condition, adolescent who is high in personal growth initiative might be better in recognizing explicit approach to counter to the condition, experience more assertiveness in his or her capability to determine the problem, and consequently feel a lesser amount of distress. This elucidation implies that personal growth initiative restrained psychological distress. Alternately, adolescents high in personal growth initiative may be capable of looking forward to difficulties and keenly effort to avert the problems from happening than individuals low in personal growth initiative.

Thus, the aim of this investigation was to explore the correlation among personal growth initiatives, psychological distress, and psychological well-being among adolescents. It was assumed that personal growth initiative is significantly associated with psychological well-being and negatively associated with psychological distress among adolescents. The rationale of this study was to explore these prospects consecutively to enhanced and understand the mechanisms through which adolescent personal growth initiative may enhance well-being and prevent distress.

## **Methodology**

### **Sample**

The total number of participants were 150 (75 males and 75 females) from different colleges of Karachi, Pakistan. Subjects were selected by using purposive sampling technique. The age range of the subjects ranged from 18-21 years (with mean age of 19.45 years). An educational level of the participants was at least intermediate. A socioeconomic status was lower, middle and high class.

### **Measure**

The data of this study was collected by using scales of Personal Growth Initiative Scale (PGIS; Robitschek, C., 1998), Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWC: Ryff., 1989), Psychological Distress Scale (K-10; Kessler, R.C., 1996), and a demographic information form.

A **Demographic Information Form** was filled by the participants, which included the information about age, gender, qualification, and currently studying in which year.

**Personal Growth Initiative Scale (PGIS; Robitschek, C., 1998)** The Personal Growth Initiative Scale (PGI) is consists of 9-items scale, a self-report measure. Participants responded on likert scale (ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree). Scores can range from 0 – 45 and were obtained by calculating the responses to the items. Those who scores high on the scale have an inclination for growth, while those low on the scores do not intentionally search out for the growth process. In this sample, the reliability coefficient is =.794.

**Psychological Well-Being Scales (PWC; Ryff, C., 1989)** is 84-items scale assesses individual's well-being at a particular time. It consists of six aspects: environmental mastery, positive relationships with others, autonomy, personal growth, self-acceptance, and purpose in life. PWC is a six-point likert scale (ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree). The measure includes 39 reverse items. Scores higher on each on scale shows greater well-being on that subscale with a Cronbach's alpha value of .951.

**Psychological Distress Scale (K-10; Kessler, R.C., 1996)** is a 10-item, self-report questionnaire proposed to measure distress based on questions about depressive and anxiety symptoms that a person has experienced in the most recent 4 week period. K-10 measure rated on 5-point rating scale (ranging from none of the time to all of the time). Scores will range from 10 to 50. In this study, Psychological Distress Scale found to be internally consistent at the level of = .786.

## Procedure

The participants were approached from various colleges of Karachi, Pakistan. Then the aim of the study was elucidated to the participants. Informed consents of the college authorities and students were obtained. A written consent was taken from the participant and they were ensured about the confidentiality of the information. Firstly demographic information was filled by the participants then researcher gave direction for the Personal Growth Initiative Scale (PGIS; Robitschek, C., 1998), and Psychological Well-Being Scales (PWC: Ryff., 1989). After completion of the questionnaire, participants were thanked for being participation in this research and for their precious time. Later on demographic form was analyzed and Personal Growth Initiative Scale (PGIS; Robitschek, C., 1998) and Psychological Well-Being Scales (PWC: Ryff., 1989) were scored according to the instructions given in the manual.

## Results

After data collection test sheets were scored according to the instructions given in the manual. Descriptive statistics was applied for demographic information's and Spearman's rho was used to determine correlation among personal growth initiative, psychological distress, and psychological well-being, through Statistical Package for Social Sciences, 17 versions. Descriptive Statistics for demographic information was reported in table 1. The subjects of the study comprised of 150 (75 males and 75 females) students of different colleges of Karachi, Pakistan. The age of the participants were 18 years (14%), 19 years (28.7%), 20 years (38.7%), and 21 years (18.6%). Subjects were from freshmen (25%), sophomore (33.6%), junior (28.4%), and seniors (13%). Their family origins were one parent family (15.3%), two parent original families (83.3%), and one step parent family (1.4%). As for CGPA, range from 3.5 to 3.9 (9.3%), 3 to 3.49(47.3%), 2.5 to 2.9 (38%), and less than 1.99 (5.4%).

To assess relationships among variables i.e. personal growth initiative, psychological distress, and psychological well-being a spearman's rho was applied reported in table 3. According to the results, a positive correlation was found among psychological well-being and personal growth initiative and correlation is significant at 0.01 levels (2-tailed). And negative correlation was found among

psychological distress and personal growth initiative scale. A correlation between sub-scales of psychological well-being scales (autonomy, self-acceptance, positive relations with others, purpose in life, environmental mastery, and personal growth) was assessed with psychological well-being and psychological distress. A positive correlation was found between subscales of psychological well-being and personal growth initiative scale. But weak relationship was found between subscales of psychological well-being and psychological distress scale.

**Table 1.** Percentage Table for Respondents’ Demographic Information.

Demographic Variables		Percentage %	Demographic Variables		Percentage %
<b>Age</b>	18 yrs	14%	<b>Years in the University</b>	Freshmen	25%
	19 yrs	28.7%		Sophomore	33.6%
	20 yrs	38.7%		Junior	28.4%
	21 yrs	18.6%		Senior	13%
<b>Gender</b>	Female	50%	<b>Family Origin</b>	one parent family	15.3%
	Male	50%		two parent original families	83.3%
				one step parent family	1.4%
<b>Socioeconomic Status</b>	Lower	10.2%	<b>CGPA</b>	4.00	0%
	Middle	69.8%		3.5 to 3.99	9.3%
	Upper	20%		3.0 to 3.49	47.3%
				2.5 to 2.99	38%
				o 2.49 than 1.99	5.4%

**Note.** Demographic information of participants in percentage.

**Table 2.** Correlations (Spearman’s rho) of Psychological well-being, Personal Growth Initiative, and Psychological Distress.

Variables	Personal Growth Initiative
<b>Psychological Well-Being</b>	0.231**
<b>Psychological Distress</b>	-.078

Note. Verifies positive correlation among psychological well-being and personal growth initiative. A negative correlation was found among psychological distress and personal growth initiative. \*\*Correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed)

**Table 3.** Correlations (Spearman’s rho) between Psychological Well-being Subscales, Personal Growth Initiative Scale, and Psychological Distress Scale.

Psychological Well-being Subscales	Personal Growth Initiative Scale	Psychological Distress Scale
Autonomy	.222**	.124
Positive Relations with others	.241**	.011
Environmental Mastery	.344**	.132
Self-Acceptance	.544**	-.155
Personal Growth	.478**	.064
Purpose in Life	.561**	.095

Note. Verifies correlation between Sub-scales of Psychological well-being (autonomy, self-acceptance, positive relations with others, purpose in life, environmental mastery, and personal growth) personal growth initiative scale, and psychological distress scale. \*\*Correlation is significant at 0.01 levels (2-tailed).

## **Discussion**

This study analysed the hypotheses that personal growth initiative is significantly associated with psychological well-being, and negatively associated with psychological distress among adolescents. However, the results of the study suggest significant relationship between both the variables i.e., psychological well-being and personal growth initiative. This finding supports previous researches. For example, personal growth initiative has been positively associated to psychological well-being (Robitschek, 1998; Robitschek & Kashubeck, 1999). The possible reasons of this finding is that personal growth initiative promotes better well-being, as a higher level of PGI is a sign of eudemonic well-being, that is, the feeling conveyed when one employs actions endeavoured at attaining one's prospective. Moreover, when a person follows objective this shows intrinsic motivation proposed at personal growth. An individual has a propensity to experience subjective well-being than when pursue goals with extrinsic motivation, for instance enhancement of one's status or monetary success. In addition college students, who are comparatively high on personal growth initiative and more intended in self-enhancement than low in PGI, they acknowledge themselves more, perceive more purpose in their life, have healthier relationships with others, have a superior sense of self-sufficiency, and perceive mastery over their environment. In the same way, they have a better feeling of association to their society, a superior sense of contributing to their society, more thoughtful of society around them, a progressive perception of the world, and a positive view of the world. They also have satisfaction in life and feel happier and generally more optimistic belief.

Furthermore, negative correlation was found between psychological distress and personal growth initiative. The findings of the study support previous researches. For example a study by Robitschek & Kashubeck, (1999) personal growth initiative is correlated to psychological well-being, and negatively associated with psychological distress. A possible reason of this finding is that personal growth initiative reduces the risk of psychological distress. Those adolescents high in personal growth initiative seem to experience lower level of stress and depression.

There are some limitations of the study. Firstly, all questionnaires in the current study were self-report. Self-report measures participants respond in ways that are socially enviable relatively than their real response on each item. Secondly, sample was limited as it was drawn from different colleges of Karachi, all those adolescents who have not attended college or from different cities of Pakistan were not included, which can lead to a problem in generalizability of the findings. Additional study should include sample of those who have not attended colleges and from other cities of Pakistan. Finally, this research did not measure causal relationship of personal growth initiative with psychological distress and psychological well-being. Future study can investigate a causal effect of personal growth initiative with two other variables.

The significance of the findings suggests that personal growth initiative is an essential area of research. The personal growth initiative can prevent college students from mental health issues. PGI is a cognitive element, which includes understanding how to change, considering it is possible, and behavioural elements, for instance taking initiatives to really perform the modified development. The college counsellor can teach skills to students and engage them more into personal growth initiative thoughts. It will enhance adolescent's mental health and prevent them from psychological distress. Further these results can help mental health professionals in understanding adolescent's personal growth need and how it can improve psychological well-being. This study could also embark to fill out the gap in the existing literature. It is consequently, expected that these results will help parents, scholars, counsellors, government, higher education administration, and for all those who are interested in adolescents mental health.

## Conclusion

To conclude, the findings of the study support the hypotheses that personal growth initiative is positively associated with psychological well-being. Furthermore, personal growth initiative is negatively associated with psychological distress among adolescents. Adolescents with high personal growth initiative and positive psychological well-being experience less mental health problems.

## References

1. Arnett, J.J. (1999). Adolescent storm and stress, reconsidered. *American Psychologist*, **54**(5), 317–324.
2. Blanchflower, D. G. & Oswald, A. J. (2008). Is well-being U-shaped over the life cycle? *Social Science & Medicine*, **66** (8), 1733–1749.
3. Brown, K. W. & Ryan, R. M. (2003). The benefits of being present: mindfulness and its role in psychological well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, **84**, 822–848.
4. Brown, R.T. (1992). Psychosomatic problems in adolescents. *Adolescent Medicine*, **3**(1), 87–96.
5. Deci, E. L. & Ryan, R. M. (2008). Hedonia, eudaimonia, and well-being: An introduction. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, **9**, 1–11.
6. Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1985). *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior*. New York: Plenum Press.
7. Diener, E. & Diener, M. (1995). Cross-cultural correlates of life satisfaction and self-esteem. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, **68** (4), 653–663.
8. Dubow, E.F., Lovko, K.R. & Kausch, D.F. (1990). Demographic differences in adolescents' health concerns and perceptions of helping agents. *Journal of Clinical Child Psychology*, **19**(1), 44–54.
9. Galbraith, G., Strauss, M., Jordan-Viola, E., & Cross, H. (1974). Social desirability ratings from males and females: A sexual item pool. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, **42**, 909–910.
10. Ingersoll G.M. (1989) *Adolescence*, 2nd edition. Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey.
11. Kessler, R.C. (1996). *Kessler's 10 Psychological Distress Scale*. Harvard Medical School: Boston, MA.
12. Keyes, C. L. M., Shmotkin, D., & Ryff, C. D. (2002). Optimizing well-being: The empirical encounter of two traditions. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, **82** (6), 1007–1029.
13. Kwan, V. S., Bond, M. H., & Singelis, T. M. (1997). Pancultural explanations for life satisfaction: Adding relationship harmony to self-esteem. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, **73** (5), 1038–1051.
14. Offer, D. & Schonert-Reichl, K.A. (1992). Debunking the myths of adolescence: Findings from recent research. *Journal of the American Academy of Child Adolescence and Psychiatry*, **31**(6), 1003–1014.
15. Robitschek, C. (2003). Validity of Personal Growth Initiative Scale scores with a Mexican American College Student Population. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, **50** (4), 496–502.
16. Robitschek, C. & Kashubeck, S. (1999). A structural model of parental alcoholism, family functioning, and psychological health: The mediating effects of hardiness and personal growth orientation. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, **46**, 159–172.
17. Robitschek, C. (1998). Personal Growth Initiative: The construct and its measures. *Measurement and Evaluation in Counseling and Development*, **30**(4), 183–198.
18. Robitschek, C. (1997). Life/Career Renewal: An Intervention for Vocational and Other Life Transations. *Journal of Career Development*, **24**(2), 133–46.
19. Roothman, B., Kirsten, D., & Wissing, M. (2003). Gender differences in aspects of psychological well-being. *South African Journal of Psychology*, **33** (4), 212–218.

20. Ryff, C. D. (1989). Happiness is everything, or is it? Explorations on the meaning of psychological well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, **57**, 1069–1081.
21. Ryff, C. D. (1989a). "Beyond Ponce De Leon and Life Satisfaction: New Directions in the Quest of Successful Aging." *International Journal of Development*, **12**, 35–55.
22. Ryff, C. D. (1989b). "Happiness Is Everything, or Is It? Explorations on the Meaning of Psychological Well-Being." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, **57**(6), 1069–81.
23. Seligman, M. E. P. & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000). *Positive Psychology: An introduction*. *American Psychologist*, **55** (1), 5–14.
24. Sheldon, K. M. & Neimeic, C. P. (2006). It's not just the amount that counts: Balanced need satisfaction also affects well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, **91** (2), 331–341.
25. Shields, M. A. & Price, S. W. (2005). Exploring the economic and social determinants of psychological well-being and perceived social support in England. *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society Series A*, **168** (3), 513–537.
26. Siddique, C.M., & D'Arcy, C. (1984). Adolescence, stress and psychological well-being. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, **13**(6), 459–471.